



Development of Southern French and Catalan Society, 718-1050

Archibald R. Lewis

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Early in the eighth century, the current of the Muslim movement that inundated northern Spain crept over the Pyrenees to spread across a portion of the French Midi. From the north the tide of Carolingian conquest forced the Muslims back and took in these same southern French and northern Spanish provinces. During the same era the Vikings raided intermittently and with varying degrees of intensity along the seacoasts and up the inland waterways, sometimes controlling considerable areas for extended periods.

These raids and conquests inevitably affected the way of life of the people of southern France and Catalonia. Contemporary travelers and later scholars have noted that the feudal traditions and obligations that were so strong in the north seemed very weak or nonexistent in the south. They found that the land seemed to be held largely as allods, not as feudal fiefs; they saw that women held positions of surprising power, that throughout the area there was great emphasis on money, and that the traditions of Roman and Visigothic law still survived.

Although scholars have noted these differences, no one has made a comprehensive study of southern French and Catalan society as a whole. It is to fill this void that Archibald Lewis provides this volume. In a detailed and scholarly study, based largely upon original records and chronicles, he examines the familial, social, economic, governmental, military, and religious life of the area from 718 to 1050 A.D.

Lewis gives as comprehensive a picture as the records will permit of the society that existed in the early eighth century, describes and discusses the major changes which took place during the next three centuries, and analyzes their causes and effects. This study, which includes careful and detailed notes and an extensive bibliography, provides a reliable and long-needed reference tool.

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